

Why Pursuing God Needs to Be First with Brad and Lisa Valencia

No More Perfect Date Night

Jill Savage: Well, welcome to this month's Dive Deep interview and we are excited because we have with us Brad and Lisa Valencia.

Mark Savage: Yeah.

JS: And Brad and Lisa are coming to us from Texas. Welcome to No More Perfect Date Night, guys.

[chuckle]

Brad Valencia: Yeah right? Thanks, guys.

Lisa Valencia: Excited to be here. Thanks for having us.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Yeah. So you guys have a ministry that you call Unrelenting Pursuit.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: Yes.

BV: Yes.

JS: Tell us, tell us about your ministry and how you got started with that.

LV: Wow, that's a loaded question.

BV: Mm-hmm.

[laughter]

LV: So, uh, very clearly we believe that, uh, we are passionate about being in an unrelenting pursuit of your spouse and Jesus. And so that's kind of how that, uh, name was really born.

BV: Yeah.

LV: But the journey that we got to that is really we'll get into that today, but it's born out of really, truly a story of unrelenting pursuit and, and what we have seen Jesus do in in the middle of that.

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: Yes.

LV: So we are always pointing marriages to Jesus. We're always pointing them to the unrelenting pursuit of love, joy and forgiveness.

BV: Yeah.

LV: That's kind of our, our big deal. How it started, [chuckle] it's really this guy right here.

MS: Yeah.

[laughter]

MS: So it's all your fault, Brad.

BV: Right.

[laughter]

MS: Yeah.

LV: That's what I say.

BV: Oh, my gosh.

JS: So that's great. Well, yes. I mean, what we find is, I mean, our marriage ministry has come out of our marriage crisis and um...

LV: Mm-hmm.

MS: Yeah.

JS: You know, when you've, um, been in the dark place and you've been able to find your way out...

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: Um, and, uh, you have experienced a new level of spiritual, uh, intimacy as well as intimacy in your relationship, it's very powerful.

MS: Right, yeah.

JS: So we...

MS: Yeah.

JS: We'd love to hear your story.

MS: Yeah.

LV: Okay our story. I, I always start off and then I go on a ramble for about three minutes, then I hand it over to Brad and just let him take it from there. So it just...

MS: That's cool.

LV: Bear with me. I'm gonna summarize the first 10 years of our marriage really, really quickly. But, uh, so Brad and I got married, uh, in 2001. So we've been married for 20 years now. And, you know, we really felt like we had a good marriage. And so we always, we always emphasize this, that we had a good marriage, what most people would consider ideal.

BV: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

LV: We didn't really argue a whole lot. We, we always got along fairly well. Um, we felt like we were going in the same direction. We didn't have a lot of like just opposition towards the things that we wanted in life. Um, and so we always emphasize that to people because when people hit rock bottom, so many people wanna say like, "Well, they must have had this, this and this," and they just never think...

BV: Yeah.

JS: Right.

LV: They never think it could ever happen.

JS: Right.

LV: So we always wanna emphasize that part of it. So, uh, we were married, um, we had three kids, we did a couple moves. All of the, the normal things...

BV: Yeah.

LV: That you kind of would think of that are happening in marriage and, you know, we always felt like we had a certain comfortability with each other because we had chosen, right, right we both had faith and we were both moving in the same direction. And so, um, looking back at this time in our life, we can see there was a lot of things that we weren't pursuing with intentionality. I kind of, um, felt like during that time we were a little disconnected, but I really kind of blamed that on the fact that we had three young children at the time. So, um, our youngest was about nine months old. And for anybody watching, listening, you know that at that time, things can seem a little disconnected with your spouse just because you have a little baby clinging to you all the time, a little kid. So that's kind of what I had attributed this little bit of a distance that I felt between us.

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: Mm-hmm.

LV: But clearly there was a lot, so that's summarizing the first 10 years. And then I hand the reins over to the, to the wonderful hubs over here, and let him take over.

BV: I, I'm... She says this all, like, I don't remember feeling disconnected.

JS: Oh.

LV: No, we just... We didn't have like a...

BV: So like that's... Like you, you, you've said it a few times, like on different things. But I honestly, I don't remember feeling, uh, being disconnected.

LV: I think what I felt is probably more because when you have just had a baby and you're going through those things in general...

BV: Yeah, maybe.

LV: I feel like it creates a little bit of disconnect because I myself was not comfortable in my own body yet, in my own skin, you kinda have your touch quota filled by your baby. So I think that that is more the space, the head space that I was in.

JS: Yeah.

BV: Yeah.

MS: I...

BV: Oh. Oh, no, go ahead. Go ahead.

MS: Well, I, I remember when we had little ones and Jill, uh, would be touched out all day and then...

LV: Mm-hmm.

JS: Now, the way I always put it is I you know, I had one baby attached to my chest, I had two toddlers attached to my legs and I get everybody in bed at night only to fall in bed next to a husband who had a gleam in his eye. [laughter] And I wanted to say, "Okay, one more person touches this body." This is not gonna be a good thing.

[laughter]

MS: You did say that. Don't even think about it, buddy.

[laughter]

BV: Gosh. Yeah. Oh man. But yeah, like, like Lisa was saying, we've had, we had the, the, um, you know, the, the typical storybook marriage, you know, house, two cars, kids, we had a dog, like the whole thing. Went to church, we both grew up in church. I grew up, um... You know her dad's a pastor. I've my um... My uncles, my grandfather they're, they're all pastors or were pastors. So I grew up in, you know, sleeping on the pew kind of deal when I was little. So we had like the, you know, the stereotypical, like Christian...

JS: Yeah.

BV: Like marriage and had a career, or have a career still, but you know, all that stuff. And, um, it was like Lisa said, 10 years in our marriage, so it was around 2011 or it was 2011, but, um, I travel a lot for work, um, with different various things that, that we do at work and I was gone for a little while. And during that time I started just to like make, um, small little compromises here and there.

JS: Hmm.

BV: Um, nothing that you would categorize as like a big major thing, or, you know, it's just allowing myself just to make little compromises. And I wasn't... You know, I look back now, if you would have asked me then, it would've been a totally different answer. But I look back now and I know I didn't have that, that truly grounded, rooted relationship with God. You know, I had my walk with God, but I didn't, it wasn't, it wasn't strong. It wasn't like that...

JS: It wasn't leading your life.

BV: No, I was just kind of like moving along with it. Right?

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Um...

JS: Yeah.

BV: And I think it was just... I don't know. I mean, I, I like pray that my kids never have a testimony, you know. [chuckle]

MS: Right, I know.

BV: Like a testimony that is not a testimony.

MS: Because it's usually painful. [laughter]

BV: Yeah, absolutely.

MS: Yeah.

BV: And, uh, you know, so I feel that there was times I was close to God. Um, and then there was times I felt like I was growing a good relationship with God, but I didn't really understand it, um,

how to like really root myself in my own walk with Christ. So I made all these little compromises. And then this...

JS: And Brad...

BV: Oh, yeah go ahead.

JS: Do you mind if I ask you just to give an example of one or two of the compromises?

BV: Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely. So like, we'd be out during the day working and then at night, like I'd go to dinner with the guys and then, um, maybe have a beer or two, and then that led into, um, staying out later and more drinks and then that led into, um, starting to look at other, uh, you know, women just starting to look at other women.

JS: Mm-hmm.

BV: And then it just kind of snowballed, you know, and then I get back to the hotel and then, you know, I mean, going from, you know, caught, like all these slow, little tiny compromises to, you know, getting into pornography and then to...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Starting to lie and just starting to grow these little compromises, you know, if you, you don't just like... I, I tell men that I didn't just roll outta bed one day and go like, "Oh, I'm gonna walk out on my family today."

LV: Today's the day.

JS: Yeah, right.

BV: And, you know, uh, "This is what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna just throw everything away."

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Like it never happens that way. And so even if you feel that it happened that way, there's gotta be these small compromises that you made that got yourself to this position.

JS: Yeah.

MS: Yes.

BV: So, I mean, it finally got so far that, um, you know, I just was living this double life, um, and I didn't even recognize myself anymore, but at that point it was just like, well, everything's done. Um, you know, even during this time, I remember thinking... 'Cause I knew enough about Scripture... [chuckle]

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: To, um, to either feel shame or to twist it. And...

JS: Yeah.

BV: I remember thinking to myself like there's that... And I should really memorize the Scripture 'cause I always bring it up. But when Jesus is saying, "If you've, you know, lusted in your heart after, uh, a woman that you've already committed the act and... "

JS: Yeah.

BV: And so then I was like, "Well, I mean, Jesus said it, I've already done this, so I'm just gonna keep doing, like I'm gonna go further." Right? And clearly...

MS: Yeah.

BV: That is totally stretching and twisting that Scripture. Yes he said that, but it wasn't, you know... It's not like... I mean, 'cause then we're all guilty of fully committing all these acts and you know, learning later, you know, you could take captive of your own thoughts that you can...

JS: Yeah.

MS: Right.

BV: You know, bring... You know, it's... A lot of people, they twist that Scripture 'cause they're like, "Oh I thought of this so that means I did it," but that's not true. What he's saying there is, are you dwelling on it? Is that what you're wanting? You know, is that the urges that you're just sitting there and like constantly thinking about it and wanting to pursue it?

JS: Yes.

BV: Versus...

LV: We're all guilty.

BV: Yeah, versus like a fleeting thought that you can take control of and...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: And you know, and turn it over to God. Um, so yeah, that's... I mean, I, you know, stepped out on my family, I had an affair and, um, a few months go by and then Lisa finds out. I don't confess. She literally finds out...

LV: Mm-hmm.

BV: And she, you know, confronts me about it and I'm like, "Well, everything's over," you know. 'Cause I grew up... I mean, not saying this is like the horrible way 'cause my parents are awesome, but you know, the, the church back then I think was very like...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: "Here's a list of things you can't do, and then you go to heaven" kind of deal.

MS: Right. Right.

BV: You know what I mean? And like...

MS: I do.

BV: For especially for a young person where it's like, "Don't do that, don't do that, don't do that, don't do that..." "

MS: Right.

BV: Why? 'Cause the Bible says don't do it and if you do it, you're going to hell.

MS: Yeah.

BV: And so to me it was like this, well, I've already signed that contract kind of deal and...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: That's it, it's over.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Um, and clearly even back then, you know the list, it's... You just gotta really dive into the Bible yourself, too, 'cause... [chuckle]

MS: Right.

BV: Those are definitely sins you, you're not supposed to do, we're not supposed to sin, but you know, you really need to get into... This whole experience has taught me that there's that list of don'ts, it's, it's freedom, um, you know, through Jesus.

MS: Yeah.

BV: You know, it's not a...

JS: That he's protecting us. He's really protecting us.

BV: Yeah, exactly.

MS: Right.

JS: From the pain that will happen...

BV: Yeah.

JS: If we...

BV: Absolutely.

JS: If we do the, the list of don'ts.

BV: Yes, absolutely.

MS: And Brad, I, I tell you that's totally my story. Uh, I didn't grow up in church, but um, I never thought an affair would be a part of our tapestry of our family.

JS: Mm-hmm.

MS: And...

JS: Yeah.

MS: Uh, I had the affair. I moved out, uh. I was pursuing divorce because I felt like I've already made a mess. I might as well walk it out. And I thank God that he stopped me from making a bigger mess, you know, and, uh, and he just... And really that's our... Our ministry is, uh, helping couples to stop making messes.

JS: Mm-hmm. For sure.

MS: You know. [chuckle]

JS: Yeah, which I know, that's why we love what you guys have been... You know we've seen what you guys have done on Instagram, and that's what you're trying to do, as well. So...

BV: Yeah.

JS: Pick back up with your story there, Brad. Um, so Lisa found out and...

BV: Yeah.

JS: What happened at that point?

BV: So, um, I moved out and I was living with just, you know, friends that I knew that were kind of just passing through town type of deal and, um, I started to like shut away everybody that would speak life into me, like I didn't wanna hear it. Um, 'cause I... It doesn't matter how far away you go, you know you're doing wrong. Um, you know, so I just started doing that and accepting that, you know, we're gonna have a divorce, accepting that my life was gonna change, their lives were gonna change, you know, the whole the whole thing that goes along with divorce.

JS: Yeah.

BV: Um, so we went through the whole process and, um, during that time, I just kept doing... Living the life that I thought I wanted to live, right? Like this is... I could do whatever I want whenever I want, it doesn't matter, like you know, nothing. And so I just continue to do that. What I didn't know was in the background, just to like kind of segue into how I think that I came back, was, you know, Lisa was going through a lot clearly, but also she was praying a lot, um, for me, not necessarily like, yes, praying for our marriage, but once you think it's gone, you know, she was praying a lot just for me.

JS: Yes.

BV: And my parents were praying for me. Um, my parents had, you know, friend churches praying for me. You know...

JS: Yeah.

BV: All these people that were praying specifically, not necessarily, that like our marriage would get back together and that, you know, all this, you know, would, would be where we're at now, but it was literally just praying for my salvation, for me to see what I'm doing wrong, you know, for me to turn back around.

JS: Yeah.

BV: Um, so one night, I was... Or not night. I don't know what time of day it was. Whatever. I'm horrible with times. [laughter] It doesn't matter. Um, it's kinda irrelevant to the story.

[laughter]

BV: But um...

MS: We're with you.

BV: I was on my... Yeah. I was on my way back, uh, from just uh a weekend away and, um, I had like... Well, I had my Road to Damascus experience...

MS: Mmm, yeah.

BV: Um, you know, where there was no blinding light, there was no like audible voice from God. That would have been amazing, but that's not what happened. Um, but it was just... He he was speaking to me. God definitely spoke to me that day and, um, it was so loud, but like I said, not audible, but it was just this...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: This sense.

JS: Yes.

BV: And, um, he was telling me, he gave me a choice right then and there, and it was like, "Here

here's your fork in the road, you know, continue the life you're gonna continue. Um, it's gonna lead to death and... " And I really did at that time, 'cause I know like all sin leads to death, and you know, you hear that all the time, and it's a 100% true, but I felt like this was like an urgency, you know like...

JS: Yes.

MS: Yes.

BV: Like it was close, you know. Whatever was gonna happen was close. And then the other option was literally just... Or just turn around. Like, "Come back to me. I'm right here. You know, you can never go too far." Um, it wasn't like, "Go back to your marriage." It wasn't, you know, that all these things are gonna be fixed if you just turn around and lay everything down. I had no idea what was gonna happen. I just chose, you know, at that moment, I was like, "Okay, God, you know let's... Let me come back." And, um, you know I was on the side of the road crying and I called Lisa because that was really the only thing I knew to do next, you know, like I didn't have anything else to do. So I called her and I was like, "Is there any way we can work this out?"

JS: Wow.

BV: And then, you know... I mean, that that was the beginning of the long, you know...

JS: Process of rest... Yes, of restoration.

BV: Restoration and rebuilding trust. Um...

JS: Oh, yeah.

BV: You know, defining my personal walk with God and...

JS: Yes.

MS: Yeah.

BV: And rooting it and cementing it in the ground. And I continue to grow daily, like I, I'll never... We'll never know everything, you know. We'll never get to the point of complete growth. But learning that that was... Basically learning my priority in a long way, where God's my priority, and then everything else falls under that.

JS: Yeah, yeah.

BV: And so, you know, just... It was just... It was a... That was the beginning of a long road.

JS: Yes, yes, yes.

LV: Something that you always, you know, talk about, too, that I think is so powerful, is how patient the enemy is and how...

BV: Yeah.

LV: He used, you know, so many different aspects of, you know, various things to really bring you to that place, and I just think, too, us all recognizing how patient, the enemy is in our lives, like right, he's out to kill, steal, destroy.

JS: Yep.

LV: He was completely out to destroy our marriage and our legacy and, you know, our children's legacy.

JS: Yes.

LV: All of those things was like... It was much bigger than just even the two of us, and I will say because I think this is such a cool God thing, because I, I was the one who actually initiated the divorce process because Brad really wanted nothing to do with reconciliation whatsoever. So even as I was praying and crying out to God for my marriage, I also knew that there came a point, 'cause this is over months that I had to stand for truth, so that was really where, you know, I knew like, "Okay, I'm going to take this step and I'm gonna continue to pray that this will wake Brad up, that these...

JS: Yes.

LV: Earthly consequences that he was facing would be something that would wake him up, and so anyone who's gone through a divorce process or a divorce, I mean, you know how gut-wrenching that is.

BV: Yeah.

LV: You are literally ripping apart by the scenes, [chuckle] your life that you've sown together. It is very simple to bring something together, very difficult to rip it apart, and that is where we were.

MS: Yeah.

LV: And so after dividing all the things and time with kids and holidays and finances and all that stuff, um, Brad had called that day and, and said, you know, "Maybe, is there any way we could work things out?" And, you know, it was really... That in and of itself was a miracle because at this stage of the game, our marriage was hopeless, and so... I really always, [chuckle] I always feel like looking back that God let it get as bad as it could get, so I could never take credit for anything.

[laughter]

MS: Yeah, yeah.

LV: Like I can never say, you know, "I did this, this, and this, and that just brought it all around... " No, I mean, God had to gut-wrenchingly show me what it meant to surrender my marriage and my husband. I mean, it was just like peeling my fingers off of a situation that I desperately wanted to be able to make better.

JS: Yes.

LV: And so I mean it was gut-wrenching. But anyways, an hour after Brad had called and said that, my lawyer called and said, "Papers are completely ready, the judge just needs to sign them."

JS: Oh, my goodness!

LV: It was really one of those moments where you know like, your, your feet are in the water, you know, of the Red Sea... [laughter]

BV: Yeah.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: And you're just like, "Okay, God, are you gonna part this water, are you gonna make a way through this?" And so, um, I didn't have enough faith in that moment to tell him to rip it up, but I did tell him to hold on.

[laughter]

JS: Yeah.

MS: Yeah, I understand.

LV: So it was one faith step at time.

MS: Yeah.

LV: But I would say, there's so much that God did. It's very funny because Brad and I really did a lot of our journey separately...

BV: Yeah.

JS: Mm-hmm.

LV: During this period of time, which kind of is a little bit different than a lot of people's stories as far as, you know, a lot of times that happens together. Ours was pretty separate for a long period of time. And so God did have to walk me through forgiveness before Brad even ever asked about it, and...

JS: Right.

MS: Mmm.

LV: It was, I would say anyone who's listening to this, this is where, where people always wonder, could I ever forgive something like this?

BV: Yeah.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: Or maybe just in your marriage in general, you're harboring this thing that is just like, "No, I'm not willing to let this go because you were so wrong."

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: And I would just encourage anyone listening, yes, Brad was completely in the wrong, and he knows that, I know that, but it wasn't about that. It was about me recognizing that, "Okay, I'm going to choose to forgive no matter what, so that I can grow, so that I can heal." I did not want to be a bitter and discouraged woman...

JS: Yes.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: My entire life, and I knew... I was reading a book at the time, um, called Bait of Satan by John Bevere...

JS: Yes.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: And in there he talks about that it... How Satan uses discouragement and bitterness...

JS: Yes.

LV: And I knew like reading that...

[chuckle]

LV: I was like, Okay, I can see myself leaning towards it, you know, 'cause I felt very justified...

JS: Yeah.

MS: Right.

LV: Feeling bitter and discouraged. I mean, it was like, "Here I was with my three kids by myself, you know, feeling like my life as I knew it was completely over," and I just felt like he was out having, doing whatever he wanted, [chuckle] having a good old time...

MS: Right.

LV: And I was stuck in the reality...

JS: Yeah.

JS: And I could feel myself getting bitter and discouraged.

MS: Mmm.

LV: And I just recognized that no matter whether our story was going to be back together, no matter how our... My story read, that I did not want to be a bitter and discouraged woman.

JS: Yes.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: And I was going to choose to walk towards healing, as painful as that was, regardless of what happened in our marriage.

JS: Mm-hmm.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: And for anyone listening, I mean, that's just, that's so important. That's such a huge factor for somebody.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: This isn't about excusing behavior...

BV: Mm-mmm.

LV: That's not what this is. This is for you. This is for your healing and for God to really take you to the next step for what He has for you.

JS: Yes.

MS: Yeah.

LV: And it's really not that power that that other individual has over all of your emotions. It's like, "Okay, God, take me where you want me to, take where you want me."

BV: Mm-hmm.

JS: Yeah, absolutely, yeah. We found that, as well. For sure.

MS: Right, right. Brad, what, what was it like for you to forgive yourself?

BV: [chuckle] Yeah, that didn't happen probably, um...

LV: I think it was probably about four years ago.

BV: You think? I don't know.

[overlapping conversation]

MS: Ah, so you so you held on to it for a while?

BV: Yeah, I mean not probably, I wouldn't say like, uh, where anyone could tell, you know.

LV: Mm-hmm.

MS: Right, right.

JS: But it was an internal struggle, a continuing internal struggle.

BV: Absolutely. Um, it wasn't four years ago. It was, it was probably 2020, you know, somewhere around there.

LV: Oh.

BV: Maybe 2019.

JS: Mm-hmm.

BV: But, um, I was so like I was talking about where my priority's God.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Um, I saturate my life in Jesus, and I've done that for a long time, um, you know after all this has happened.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: So music, you know, all the stuff, I just make sure that everything is, is focused around that, so part of that routine is, um, daily devotions.

JS: Mm-hmm.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: So whether, usually it's in the morning, um, but sometimes, you know, with work schedules and stuff like that, you know it's just whenever I can get it in. But usually I want to do it, uh, first thing in the morning, so I would just finish devotions and I was... Actually I pray a lot in the shower, too...

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: Mm-hmm.

MS: Yeah.

BV: I was in the shower and just kind of like getting ready for the day and just praying and, um, what I, you know, every now and then I'd always pray and kinda get mad, um, not at God, kinda, you know, at myself.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Because I was like I see... Like I missed a lot of my youngest's, you know, time. You know like the...

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: The baby time.

BV: The baby time, right?

MS: Right, right.

BV: It's so fast. It goes so fast. Old the adage of like they grow up so fast, 100% true. Anybody that's listening and that doesn't have kids and is gonna have kids, like listen to that, it goes by fast.

MS: Yes.

BV: And, um, so I missed a lot of that baby stage.

JS: So there was regret for you. A lot of regret.

BV: Oh, yeah. Absolutely 100%.

JS: Mm-hmm.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: And I'd see that when I'd look at the kids, when I'd look at our youngest. When I'd look at Lisa I knew all the things I had done. And you know, even though, you know, God forgave me, our marriage is, was... Is way better than it was before...

JS: Yep.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: And we didn't even have problems necessarily before, it's just, God's just done a huge work in our lives. But um, he really... You know, when I was praying, that really came over me that, um, you know, I was looking at it the wrong way. I was seeing the scars, uh, you know, that I had on me, that, that the kids have. They probably don't even know they have, right, 'cause they're so young, but they have these scars. Lisa has these scars that I gave them, that's how I always looked at it. And that moment when I was praying it was a shift of perspective that God gave me, and it was

more of...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: It was, not more of, but God saying, "Those scars are reminders of what I did to heal everything."

JS: Oh.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: They're not open wounds. They're not, you know, these horrible scars that you need to like cover up in shame. It's like these are reminders of what miracle happened and what God did, and so it, I think at that point, then I was really able to like, you know, lay down the shame, lay down the regrets...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: And of course, you know, I don't... I wish none of that ever happened, clearly.

JS: Sure.

MS: I know, yeah.

BV: But, um, anyway, I think that was the moment that I truly like forgave myself because yeah, I mean, Lisa's side like forgiving me had to be super hard, and I think that people that go through anything, it doesn't even have to be this big, but just anything like this, um, the, the, the... Not the victim. The, uh, I can't think of the word... The bad guy.

[laughter]

MS: Yeah.

JS: The betrayer, the betrayer. Yeah.

BV: The betrayer, the bad guy. Um...

MS: I like the bad guy.

BV: Yeah.

[laughter]

MS: Yeah. That's what I felt like...

[laughter]

BV: Yeah, absolutely.

MS: I'm the bad guy.

[laughter]

BV: Um, a lot of people forget that, like, you have to forgive yourself, too.

MS: Absolutely.

JS: Yep.

MS: That's why I asked. Yep.

BV: Yeah. It took a long time. It took a long... And I was doing well during that time, um...

MS: Right.

BV: I mean, you know, active in church and you know, doing all this stuff and trying to...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Help others, help other marriages, help other men, um, all of those things, but yeah, there was that lingering, uh, effect of, of sin, right?

JS: Yeah.

LV: I think our, our human nature is that we always do want there to be a payment of some sort, you know, it's like...

MS: Yeah.

LV: Even for ourselves, right, there has to be some price that has to be paid, and, you know, we hope that we can eventually pay that, and, and same thing for... Uh, um, you know, the hurt spouse is...

BV: Yeah.

LV: You know, we still... Like, there was a period of time I definitely wanted Brad to carry some shame.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: You know, I really wanted him to feel like some level of pain because, you know, I wanted him to a little bit know what I felt like, even though...

BV: Mm-hmm.

LV: You know, knowing that, that is... Was not healthy.

JS: No.

LV: And eventually recognizing that there is no price that can be paid.

JS: Nope.

MS: No.

LV: There's nothing that will cover this. Only Jesus can.

JS: Yep.

MS: Right.

LV: So there's nothing that... If you have made a decision to reconcile, so many people that we've talked to, the, the betrayed spouse, it's like they have their list, and it's like, "I need you to do this, this, and this and this. And I'm gonna hold this over your head for the rest of your life." And that's where people get stuck, right? It's like...

MS: Right.

LV: You know, I'm... I... This person has this price to pay, the betrayer then feels like I'm trying to pay this price, trying to pay this price...

BV: But you can't.

LV: I can't ever pay it...

BV: There's no way.

MS: Right.

LV: And there's a just a cycle then that you're stuck in. You, you have to get to a place of, "This is a new place that we're growing, this is a new start... "

BV: Yeah.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: Uh, we're not looking to have our old marriage, we're looking for God to do a new work...

[overlapping conversation]

JS: New thing.

LV: A new marriage...

BV: Mm-hmm.

LV: You know and...

JS: Yep.

MS: Right.

LV: And that is a very much an intentional focus, right, forget the...

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: Former things. [chuckle]

JS: Yes.

MS: Right.

LV: Forget the former things, and that is a training of the brain, and you have to do that. [chuckle]

BV: I know.

LV: Over and over and over because...

MS: Yeah.

LV: There's... There're, you know, there's triggers, right? There's times where you think you're doing so good and then boom, one little thing...

BV: Right.

LV: Comes out and you're right back there.

JS: Yeah. It's so true.

LV: So it's not easy. [chuckle]

JS: Yeah.

MS: I know.

JS: Well, yeah, the, um, we, we use the phrase, "We are now Mark and Jill 2.0."

MS: And we like that.

LV: [chuckle] Love it, love it.

MS: We like that.

JS: Yeah. Mark and Jill 1.0, they weren't working so well together.

[laughter]

[overlapping conversation]

JS: And they, they, they looked good, they looked good on the outside...

LV: [chuckle] Right.

BV: Yeah.

JS: But they had, um... They had, they had things going on underneath the surface that they weren't even aware of...

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: And, um, and you know what you talked about, Brad, uh, in our book, "No More Perfect Marriages," we talk about the slow fades. And the slow fades...

LV: Mm-hmm.

BV: Yeah.

JS: Are when a relationship is eroding underneath the surface, but you...

BV: Yeah.

JS: Don't know it, and you were saying that, you know, I was making these small compromises, and we...

BV: Mm-hmm.

JS: Call those the slow fade of naivety. You were being naive.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Mm-hmm.

JS: Uh, the effect that these little things...

BV: Yep.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Were having on yourself, let alone...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Oh, yeah.

JS: Your relationship.

MS: Yeah.

BV: Absolutely.

JS: So yeah, you really just have, you know, really explained that very well. And given an example of why we need to stop the slow fade of naivety, uh...

LV: Yeah.

BV: Oh, yeah.

JS: In order to protect our heart...

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: And to protect our marriage.

MS: Yeah.

BV: Yeah, I mean, I really look at all of this, and we've talked about it on our podcast, too, where, you know, becoming a Christian, deciding to, um, follow God, be a disciple of Jesus...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: It's, it's continual training, right?

JS: Mm-hmm.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: And it's, it's not just... Your training, so like Lisa was talking about earlier, where, you know, our enemy, Satan, he's the most strategic, uh, enemy that anyone will ever face...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: And it's, um, 24 hours, you know, just constant, right, seven days a week, non... Non-stop, um, trying to break what God has created.

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: Yeah.

BV: And he's done that from the very beginning...

MS: Right.

BV: You know, with Adam and Eve, like, ever since then, he's always fighting to try to break... And so I, I tell people, "If you knew, uh, a physical being was coming at you like that, um, strongly, right?"

JS: Yes.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: "You would do everything you could in your power to, um, stop it, to know more about it... "

MS: Right.

BV: "To learn what to do to combat it," like all these things. Like if you've never shot a gun, you could go buy a gun and start shooting guns. Like you know, all these things, like you would learn...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Everything. You'd put up cameras around your house, like you'd alter your routes to and from work. Like you would do all these crazy things...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Because you knew this guy was after you and your family, and you would lead your family well, and you would teach your family those things and you would bring them under your umbrella and all, you know, all that, but people don't realize that that is exactly what's happening. It's just not a physical thing that you can see. And so, you know...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Reading your Bible, memorizing Scripture, um, diving deep into the Bible, not just skimming it, you know like...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Grab a verse and go deep into that verse and...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Figure out the apologetics of that verse, and go in further and further and further, and then that trains you to be able to resist those temptations when they come up to...

MS: Yeah.

BV: Um, you know, walk away from a small compromise. Um...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: 'Cause it's never a small compromise, 'cause one small compromise will snowball into something that, you know, like us, we almost lost our marriage and you know...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Everything.

JS: Yeah.

BV: And so that, that one little step in the wrong direction, that one little compromise that you think is okay, it's not okay, um, and, but you will never really know that unless you're training yourself to, to, you know... Like now we're very intentional in our marriage. We try to go on a date, uh, at least, you know...

LV: Once a week...

BV: I mean once a week. You know usually once a week, we try to get away from the kids and just be ourselves, you know...

JS: Yes.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Um, our, our priority is God and that's above everything, you know.

JS: Yeah.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: We place each other before our kids.

BV: Yeah, and that's...

JS: Yes.

LV: It always makes people get a little, "Hmm... "

JS: Marriage-centered, marriage-centered, not child-centered. Yep.

MS: Yeah.

BV: Yeah. There's a lot of things we've done, you know. I have guardrails in my life now. We have guardrails in our marriage.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: We don't...

JS: Yes.

BV: Watch things with nudity in it. We, um...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: There's a ton of...

LV: We're not gonna foster relationships with the opposite sex.

BV: Yeah, exactly.

LV: You know, I mean, there's just...

BV: You know.

LV: A lot of things people don't pay attention to till they are imploding their marriage.

JS: Yes.

MS: Right.

LV: And you wanna pay attention to those before, "What are some things that we are not going to do, that we're not going to say, that we're going to use to protect... "

BV: Yeah.

LV: "What we value?" Right? Like we want to be able to say, these are, these are the things that are in place. So if we ever bump up against those guardrails, we know. [chuckle]

JS: Yeah.

BV: Right.

LV: And we get back on track. [chuckle]

BV: Yeah.

JS: Yeah.

MS: Right.

JS: Well, and it... Those are advanced decisions we make...

MS: Yeah.

JS: To protect our marriage. They're advanced decisions we make to intentionally prioritize our marriage.

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: Absolutely.

MS: Yeah. I totally understand the the naivete and the pride and not...

BV: Yeah.

MS: Uh, I thought it was silly to have guardrails until my... I went over the cliff, [chuckle] you know.

BV: Yeah.

JS: Right, right?

MS: And I was like, "Yeah, I need to have guardrails. [chuckle] I'm a slow learner, but yeah. And...

BV: Yeah.

MS: Totally uh re-arranged my strategy with life to include those.

BV: Mm-hmm.

JS: Yeah.

MS: And so it's...

LV: Well, and I think Brad mentioned that earlier was how he did feel so much like all these things were restrictions at first...

MS: Right.

LV: You know, the things we put in place, it was our restrictions until he did, you know, say, "No, this is freedom."

BV: Yeah.

LV: Right? Like I'm...

MS: Right.

LV: Walking in freedom. I'm not, you know, I'm not doing any of those things anymore. And, and, man, I saw a shift in that because I saw my husband then who didn't defensively respond in every situation, which is so huge, too. If I did have a struggle or I was having one of those triggers, he

wasn't coming at me then from that defensive stance but in, uh, proactively just like, "I'm here for you," you know, you know...

BV: Mm-hmm.

LV: And he knew like I'm now operating in freedom. Like I'm, so I'm free to love you and meet you where you are at and remind you of those things.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: And man, you can feel that when that happens. [chuckle]

JS: Yes.

LV: That was like the best response. It's what I needed, too, to, to really find some healing between the two of us as we were rebuilding trust 'cause that was just an ongoing process.

JS: Yeah.

MS: Oh yeah.

JS: So, uh, we we don't have a ton of time, but let's talk for a moment about what that healing process looked like, because Brad made the call you know, that, um, "Do you think we can make this work?" You're right on the edge of, uh, signing divorce papers...

LV: Yeah.

JS: Obviously he makes a U-turn. You guys decided to restore. Uh, when you look at that, um, what elements were an important part of your restoring journey? What did you do to restore?

LV: Well, I would...

BV: Yeah.

LV: First say that I really expected Brad when he came home to be just a brand new man right away. [laughter] I was just like, surely, you know...

BV: Yeah.

LV: If we're in the middle of this miracle, like he's just gonna come home and like, it's just gonna be awesome and perfect.

JS: Wow! How's that for an unrealistic expectation? [laughter]

LV: I know, I know. [laughter]

BV: Right?

LV: And it's... Yeah, I... It did not, uh, live up to its expectations. [laughter]

JS: Yeah.

BV: No.

LV: And you know what, I mean, it was such a detox process...

BV: Yeah.

LV: And so that... There was that whole element. And there were so many times in the beginning that I literally asked God like, "Can you just let me go?" Uh, I know that that sounds like...

BV: Mm-hmm.

LV: 'Cause it was so gut-wrenching and painful to keep...

JS: Yes.

LV: Walking through kind of the same kind of pain and...

JS: Yes.

LV: And sometimes you think that that can't hurt me anymore and then it does, and it's just like...

MS: I know, yeah.

LV: Another layer of that. And so, um, it was, it was really like learning from myself, too. I had to just be so all in with Jesus, and let him be the one that was walking me through and keeping my hope on him, and not just looking at these circumstances 'cause it just... There are just so many times it just looked too broken and all of a sudden we were fighting. And all of a sudden...

BV: Yeah.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: We were arguing with each other, and you know, there were still conversations and emails and you know things from...

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: This whole part of his life that were still coming to the surface. And...

BV: Yeah.

JS: Yes.

LV: Back. [chuckle]

JS: Yes.

LV: And you know what, we made... We moved really like within three weeks that he came home, so we moved, there was a lot of...

MS: Yeah.

LV: Just financial decisions that we made during that time 'cause we were like, "Who cares?" [laughter] you know, like that's where we were. We just did a lot of things wrong right there in the beginning, but God was so gracious to us. He's so gracious to us...

MS: Yes.

LV: To just hold us through that process when we just...

BV: Oh, yeah.

LV: We were in such a raw pain...

[laughter]

BV: Yeah.

MS: Yeah.

BV: We were making like major decisions while we were...

LV: Everything they tell you not to do, right? [laughter]

BV: Yeah.

MS: Right.

LV: And we're doing it.

BV: And we'd tell people too, we're like, "Get counseling."

LV: Yes, get help.

BV: "Do..." You know, we have all these list of things we tell people, and we didn't do any of it at all. Um...

LV: Except go to our pastor. And we went to our pastor.

BV: Except... Yeah, like getting connected with the church, and you know... I mean we got connected with the church, went and met with the pastor and laid it all out for him.

JS: Yeah.

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: Yeah.

BV: You know, and, uh, I... That was a huge healing process for me specifically because he didn't have like this look of shock or this judging, you know...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: You know, judgmental look or anything like that. It was more of a, well, I mean, I know now 'cause we've talked, but it was this, I see where God can bring you like...

JS: Yeah.

BV: Where you're gonna be...

MS: Yeah.

BV: Through God like...

MS: Yeah.

BV: Okay, I see you now, but I know that you can be here.

JS: Yeah.

BV: Um, through Christ and I know what work he can do in your life. And so, you know, he really like spoke that into my life, and...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: And you know that was... That was also part of my healing process.

JS: Yeah.

BV: For sure.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: We definitely, we learned the importance of guardrails and...

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: Repentance. And...

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: Transparency, and that moving forward part of things and just holding on to hope, and we learned about keeping your priority God, God alone, right?

BV: Yeah.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: There were so many steps along the way that God just was so faithful to take us through and just one thing at a time, one thing at a time. He...

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: He really just wrapped his arms around us as we learned to lean into him. It's, it's what we can tell people over and over and over. We cannot guarantee the results of your marriage, right? Because it takes two people who are willing to work.

JS: Yeah.

LV: We can guarantee one thing, you turn to Jesus, he will sustain you through it all.

JS: Yep.

LV: Like he will...

MS: Oh, yeah.

LV: Take you through it all. So it's our big message, right? Turn to Jesus, turn to Jesus, turn to Jesus. He can be the person who bears your pain, who walks you through healing, who helps you to forgive both yourself and your spouse...

BV: 'Cause we've helped... We've worked with... You know, work with, but sat down with couples or over the phone or whatever, and it, it hasn't worked.

LV: Mm-hmm.

JS: Mm-hmm.

BV: You know they're they're... They have but they did get divorced. And so that's one big thing that we definitely push is like, our heart and goal is to... That marriage to be reconciled and that... Or marriages to grow stronger.

JS: Yeah.

BV: But, ultimately the goal is to have these people, um, you know, giving their all to God.

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: Yeah.

BV: Their priority is God. And if the marriage doesn't work out, okay, you know, you can move on from that, but your focus should still be in Christ.

JS: Yeah.

MS: Yes.

BV: You know, it's your eternity that we're talking about.

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: Yeah, it is.

BV: I have a... I have a really good friend, and and his marriage didn't work out and, um...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: And it... It's... It was horrible, um, but you know he's a strong believer in Christ, he's walk... You know, he's built his relationship and he's walking that walk, and, and he's walking that walk with hope, um, you know not knowing how everything's gonna work out now.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: But pushing forward, knowing that God has him and there's plans for him and there's something bigger for him, so...

JS: Yeah. Yeah, well, you know, it's really interesting and I kinda hear this theme in what you guys are talking about. We were... We just were teaching in a seminar, um, uh... We do a No More Perfect Marriages seminar in churches all over the place. And so we were teaching last weekend, and one of the couples afterwards we were talking with, and they said, "You know, the thing that I'm really taking away is how much personal growth responsibility there is in marriage."

BV: Amen.

LV: Yes.

BV: Amen.

LV: Yes, yes, yes.

JS: And, you know because... And this is what I'm hearing you guys say, you know, you met with your pastor, but bottomline, you kept growing individually...

MS: Mm-hmm.

JS: In your relationship with Jesus, and ultimately that was a big part of healing.

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: Yeah.

JS: It it was... It was as much, if not more individual work than even couple work.

[overlapping conversation]

LV: 100%.

[overlapping conversation]

BV: Oh, absolutely. 100%. It's the whole triangle, right?

[overlapping conversation]

JS: Yeah.

[overlapping conversation]

BV: The triangle, I don't know if you heard...

[overlapping conversation]

MS: Yes, I've seen it.

[overlapping conversation]

JS: Yes.

[overlapping conversation]

BV: You know, the closer you are to God, the closer you are together. Um, but it truly... You know, when our... When... For me, when my priority shifted...

MS: Mm-hmm.

BV: And it was no... I mean, I want my marriage, I want my family, I want my kids, but ultimately I want my... I want to be close to God.

JS: Yep.

MS: Right.

BV: Um, you know that was my... And so, uh, when I talk to guys that are having issues in the marriage, I'm like, "Listen, I you know, I know you want your marriage to work out, but first you gotta get this right. This vertical relationship has to be right, or else you're just gonna be chasing

your tail. And we see that all the time. I'm sure you guys hear that all the time, too. I've talked to guys, and then two weeks later, it's the same...

LV: Same story.

BV: Thing over and over and it's like, "Man... "

MS: Yeah.

BV: "Listen to me, put your marriage down for one second." [chuckle]

JS: Yeah.

BV: "Get your vertical relationship right, and then you're gonna start seeing, it's not that it's easy, but you're gonna start seeing everything else fall into place."

JS: Yep.

MS: Right.

LV: And I will say this, too, because I think it's always easy... And this is, I would say more traditionally, uh, a woman thing, right? We, we find it real easy to look over at our spouse and let God know what he needs to change.

[laughter]

JS: I know, like, like he needs a little help, like you know...

[laughter]

BV: Exactly.

LV: "Here you go Lord, here's the list, if you would just work this out." You know, and we have this whole perspective, this...

JS: Yeah.

LV: Not always because this can be other one, but traditionally... And I would say like... There there was a time when I was just like that, "God, stop worrying about me. Take care of him. [laughter] And like don't worry about me. Like... [chuckle] I'm fine.

MS: Yeah, yeah.

LV: There was so much that God had to teach me through this, so much about, oh my gosh, it's just... And he is still teaching, teaching...

JS: Oh...

MS: Sure.

JS: May he never stop.

MS: Just lights on.

LV: Yes, may he never stop.

MS: Yeah.

BV: Yeah.

LV: And I think it's so important. I think it's so easy when someone is in, um, any kind of situation where they are you know at a breaking point in your marriage to say, "This one person has done this stuff wrong, and therefore they are the only ones you need to change." And that is not the way that it works. I mean you need to just get up before God, and I'm just not justifying behavior, but this is a...

BV: No.

LV: "God, what do you have for me?"

JS: Yep.

LV: "What are you trying to show me? Grow me, show me," you know, because you will never change your spouse as much as you want to do it, as much as you you know...

MS: Right.

LV: You can get on your knees and implore him to absolutely do a work in your spouse.

JS: Yeah.

LV: That is beautiful, right?

JS: Yeah.

LV: And when you're coming from a healthy place, but at the same time, you better be saying, "Search me, change me, use me, you know... [laughter]"

MS: Right, yeah.

BV: Yeah.

JS: That is...

LV: To be willing when he's when, he's done with those things, be willing to do it.

JS: To do 'em, yeah. And you know, Lisa, that's so true because I... Um, one of the things I often say is I did not cause Mark's affair, but I contributed to the dysfunction in our marriage.

MS: Mm-hmm.

LV: Mm-hmm.

JS: And I had to be willing to look at what I brought in an unhealthy way to our relationship and there was my criticism and, and my putting the kids first and you know, those things that contributed, uh, to an, uh, an unhealthy... That unhealthy 1.0. And I had to be willing to look at that.

MS: Right.

BV: Yeah.

LV: Yes, you have to own it.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Mm-hmm. Yeah, exactly.

MS: We, we both had to surrender uh our lives, our plans, our ideas to the Lord and say, "It's not ours, but yours."

JS: Totally.

MS: "What do you want?" Yeah.

JS: So, this has been such a good conversation, so rich. Thank you, guys. Um, I have one more question, though. So, um, this is our No More Perfect Date Night, uh, interview, and we always love asking our guests, what is a favorite date night activity for you guys?

BV: Oh...

JS: What's one of your favorites? And it could be, it could be different, like you know, your favorite, Lisa, might be different than Brad's favorite.

MS: Yeah.

JS: But what's a favorite that you... That comes to mind?

BV: Probably the same. What? What do you think?

[overlapping conversation]

LV: We we have two things, I think, that we both love to do.

JS: Okay.

LV: Go ahead, you say you say first.

BV: Alright. Uh, so I mean it's pretty simple.

LV: I know exactly what you're gonna say. [laughter]

BV: Um, we just we love to go out to, uh, like some dinner, some kind of... You know to have dinner.

LV: We love food. [laughter]

BV: But... Yeah. But I mean 100%. But like finding those spots, right, not the chain places, but like finding that local spot, and it's just like great food, great conversation, you know, great atmosphere. And also we love going to the movies.

LV: Yeah.

BV: Like uh...

JS: Really?

LV: I don't know, yeah, we're just like a big dinner movie like couple.

LV: There's not been any movies lately.

BV: Yeah, lately.

LV: But the other thing that we found actually recently, probably within the last year and a half that we love to do is hiking with each other.

BV: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yes.

MS: Ah, yeah.

LV: We love, love, love when we get a chance. In fact for our 20th anniversary, we spent a significant amount of that time hiking. And...

BV: In Utah, yeah.

LV: There was something just really beautiful about reaching the mountaintop together. [chuckle] I know it sounds like...

JS: Yes.

[overlapping conversation]

MS: Oh, that's so... Yeah.

LV: You know, it it was hard and we were sweaty and gross and stinky by the time we got up there, but there was just something really beautiful about, "Okay, we did this thing. It was hard on our body and it was worth it." I don't know, it's just...

[overlapping conversation]

MS: Yeah.

BV: Yeah, we started doing that. Yeah.

JS: Oh, I love that.

MS: That's so cool, yeah.

JS: That's very fun.

MS: Yeah.

JS: Very cool. Well, this has been a great conversation and, uh, we're just so glad that you guys were willing to share your story and the wisdom learned along the way. So, um, this is Mark and Jill Savage, along with Brad and Lisa Valencia, signing off with a reminder that a real marriage isn't perfect. A real marriage is two people being perfected. Thanks for joining us.

BV: Amen.

LV: That's good.

BV: Thanks, guys.

MS: Yeah.

[music]